

Itikaaf

Allah is Rich (free of all needs) and you (mankind) are poor¹. Suppose this poor decides to get bound to the door of the Rich. Will the Rich Whose treasure is literally infinite ever refuse his begging servant? Certainly no.

In i'tikaaf also, the servant attaches himself to the door of Allah asking for forgiveness and mercy, repenting for past sins and training himself to get bound to Allah's commands from morning till evening, through day and night. The biggest advantage which a mu'takif (a person observing I'tikaaf) can never miss is to protect himself from numerous sins – the big ones and the small ones – like gazing at an unrelated person of opposite sex, telling a lie, taking part in backbiting and spreading slanders. And by Allah's mercy, he also gets the reward of those good deeds which he was used to, but cannot do now because of I'tikaaf² like accompanying a funeral procession, visiting a sick to console him, etc.

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Holy Prophet's I'tikaaf

Because of its great importance, the holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم attached great importance to its observance. He used to observe the i'tikaaf of the last ten days of Ramazaan (almost) every year³ in search of Lailatul Qadr. No form of worship can be more rewarding on Lailatul Qadr than breaking away from the world and devoting oneself entirely to salaah, Allah's remembrance, sending blessings on the holy Prophet, praying to Allah for fulfillment of needs, etc. which is the sole business of a person during i'tikaaf. In the yearly years after Hijra, he once performed the I'tikaaf for 30 days⁴. One year, he could not perform the i'tikaaf due to a journey, so he performed twenty days' i'tikaaf in the subsequent year⁵. In his last year also, he performed twenty days' i'tikaaf in Ramazaan⁶. To ensure that this sunnat-e-muakkada is

وَاللَّهُ الْغَنِيُّ وَأَنْتُمُ الْمُفْرَقُونَ (47:38)

² عن ابن عباس : أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال في المعتكف (هو يعكف الذنوب ويجري له من الحسنات كعامل الحسنات كلها) (Ibn Maaja: 1781)

³ عن عبد الله بن عمر رضي الله عنهما قال : كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يعتكف العشر الأواخر من رمضان. (Bukhari: 1921, Muslim: 1171)

⁴ عن أبي سعيد الخدري رضي الله عنه قال إن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم اعتكف العشر الأول من رمضان ثم اعتكف العشر الأوسط في قبة تركية على سديها حصير قال فأخذ الحصير بيده فنحاه في ناحية القبة ثم أطلع رأسه فكلم الناس فدنوا منه فقال

:إني اعتكفت العشر الأول ألتمس هذه الليلة ثم اعتكفت العشر الأوسط ثم أتيت فقيل لي إنها في العشر الأواخر فمن أحب منكم أن يعتكف فليعتكف فاعتكف الناس معه قال وإني أريتها ليلة وتر وأني أسجد صبيحتها في طين وماء فأصبح من ليلة إحدى وعشرين وقد قام إلى الصبح فمطرت السماء فوكف المسجد فأبصرت الطين والماء فخرج حين فرغ من صلاة الصبح وجبينه وروثه أنفه فيهما الطين والماء وإذا هي ليلة إحدى وعشرين من العشر الأواخر. (Muslim: 215)

⁵ عن أنس بن مالك : قال كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يعتكف في العشر الأواخر من رمضان فلم يعتكف عاما فلما كان في العام المقبل اعتكف عشرين. (Tirmizi: 803)

عن أبي بن كعب: أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يعتكف العشر الأواخر من رمضان . فسافر عاما . فلما كان من العام المقبل اعتكف عشرين يوما.

[ش (فسافر عاما) الظاهر أنه عام الفتح .] (Ibn Maaja: 1770)

⁶ عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال : كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يعتكف في كل رمضان عشرة أيام فلما كان العام الذي قبض فيه اعتكف عشرين يوما. (Bukhari: 1939)

not made into a farz (obligatory deed) by some over-zealous persons, he did not perform the i'tikaaf of the last ten days of Ramazaan on a certain year and instead recompensed for it in Shawwal⁷.

During the i'tikaaf, the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم would dedicate himself entirely to different kinds of worship and zikr (Allah's remembrance). He would spend most of his time in a small enclosure of tent-material built inside the masjid for this purpose. He would not come out of the masjid except for relieving himself. He would not visit a sick in these days nor accompany a funeral procession, but sometimes he would just pass by a sick person and see his condition without staying near him⁸. Sometimes he would enter his head into Hazrat Aaisha's رضي الله عنها house (whose door opened into the masjid) while his body remained outside (inside the mosque) and she would comb it⁹. This noble tradition of i'tikaaf was carried on by the glorious Prophet's (wives) and other companions and then pious and righteous men of all ages¹⁰.

Rules and Regulations Regarding I'tikaaf

وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ

Do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I'tikâf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques. (Quran: 187).

I'tikaaf

- I'tikaaf is confining oneself to a masjid where congregational salaah is regularly held with the intention of i'tikaaf.

Kinds of I'tikaaf

1. Waajib (compulsory): It is the i'tikaaf of vow. Whoever takes a vow that he would observe i'tikaaf, it becomes compulsory for him.
2. Sunnat e Muakkada Kifaaya (emphasized tradition for which observance by at least one person from every locality is enough): It is the i'tikaaf of the last ten days of Ramazaan.
3. Mustahabb (desirable): It is other than the above two kinds.

Things to be done during I'tikaaf

1. The period of the sunnat i'tikaaf is the last ten days of Ramazaan. For the waajib i'tikaaf, the period is what the person has stated in his vow while that for the mustahabb is at least a moment and there is no upper limit for it.

⁷ عن عائشة قالت : كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يعتكف في العشر الأواخر من رمضان فكانت أضرب له خباء فيصلي الصبح ثم يدخله فاستأذنت حفصة عائشة أن تضرب خباء فأذنت لها فضربت خباء فلما رآته زينب بنت جحش ضربت خباء آخر فلما أصبح النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم رأى الأخبية فقال (ما هذا) . فأخبر فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم (ألبر ترون بهن) . فترك الاعتكاف ذلك الشهر ثم اعتكف عشرة من شوال . (Bukhari:1928)

⁸ عن عائشة قالت : كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم يمر بالمريض وهو معتكف فيمر كما هو ولا يعرج يسأل عنه . (Abu Dawood: 2472)

عن عائشة أنها قالت : السنة على المعتكف أن لا يعود مريضاً ولا يشهد جنازة ولا يمس امرأة ولا يبأشرها ولا يخرج لحاجة إلا لما لابد منه ولا اعتكاف إلا بصوم ولا اعتكاف إلا في مسجد جامع . (Abu Dawood: 2473)

⁹ عن عائشة قالت : كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إذا اعتكف بدني إلى رأسه فأرجله وكان لا يدخل البيت إلا لحاجة الإنسان . (Abu Dawood: 2467)

¹⁰ عن عائشة رضي الله عنها زوج النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم : أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يعتكف العشر الأواخر من رمضان حتى توفاه الله ثم اعتكف أزواجه من بعده . (Bukhari: 1922)

2. I'tikaaf is not valid unless it is observed in a masjid where regular congregational salaats are held, i.e. a masjid which has an appointed imam (prayer-leader) and a muazzin (prayer-caller). A woman should observe the i'tikaaf in the masjid (a part of house of designated for worship) of her house.
3. For an i'tikaaf of vow, fasting is a necessary condition whereas fasting is not a pre-requisite for sunnat and mustahabb i'tikaafs.

Acts which make the I'tikaaf invalid

1. Going out of the mosque without any justification.
2. Commencement of monthly period or postnatal discharge to a woman.
3. Engaging in sexual intercourse or foreplay like kissing and caressing.

Conditions when getting out of the mosque is permitted

1. Natural reasons like relieving oneself and taking a bath that is obligatory upon him. But he should not stay outside the mosque for more than the period required for that person.
2. Shara'i reasons: For example, Juma (Friday) prayer, if Juma prayer is not held in the mosque of his i'tikaaf.
3. Necessary cases: For example, fear for one's life or his property if he remains in the mosque. If the masjid collapses, the mu'takif (person who is observing i'tikaaf) should move to another masjid immediately with the intention of completing his i'tikaaf there.

Things which are makrooh (undesirable) for a mu'takif

1. Conducting business transactions in the mosque when it is not immediately necessary for his financial needs.
2. Bringing the article of sale to the mosque if he is conducting transaction on account of necessity.
3. Keeping quiet, if he considers this to be a form of worship. If he does not consider keeping silent to be a kind of worship, then it is allowed.

I'tikaaf etiquettes

1. The mu'takif should not speak except what is good and rewarding in the Hereafter.
2. He should choose the most rewarding mosque for his i'tikaaf, i.e. Masjid Haraam for (Makka residents), then Masjid Nabawi (for Madina residents), then Masjid Aqsa (for Al Quds – also known as Jerusalem – residents) and then Jama masjid (masjid where Juma prayer is held).
3. He should engage in Quran recitation, sunnat zikr, invoking blessings on the Prophet, studying books on Islam, etc.
4. He is allowed to eat, drink and conduct business transactions, if necessary for his needs, without bringing the sale article inside the mosque.